**Qualitative market research: Focus groups**

A **focus group** is a form of qualitative research in which a **group** of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, idea, or packaging.

Why do you use focus groups?

* Gain information on how groups of stakeholders think and feel about your services or brand—all in their own words.
* Explore the background context behind what people think and feel to “walk in their shoes.”
* Test marketing concepts or new service offerings before rollout.
* Uncover hidden issues affecting stakeholder satisfaction.
* Check your assumptions about how people respond to messages or products in your industry.
* Identify new services, refine developing products, or tap new markets by brainstorming with your constituents.
* Pre-test messaging or products concepts.
* Gather stakeholder-generated language, concepts, and questions that can help build effective quantitative surveys.

4 stages of conducting focus groups

1. Planning

You need to assessment your needs, in order to define clear research goals. The research design should be aimed toward gathering specific, relevant, and attainable data. Recruitment focusses on defining the sample population and identifies the ‘right’ participants (e.g., age, gender or educational level). Lastly, a discussion guideline needs to be developed, in order for the moderator to stimulate the conversation during a focus group while collecting specific, relevant input.

1. Research implementation

The objective of the group moderation is to eliminate bias and ensure all viewpoints are heard and registered. One of the most important features is the right interpersonal skills that create a neutral, relaxed, conversational atmosphere that encourages participants to speak freely. The moderator is also responsible for a group dynamics management so that the group is not dominated by any one person’s input or opinion. Overall, duties are discussion generation and management that encourages interactions among various role-players (e.g., innovators, early adopters, laggards, etc.) to learn how they may influence one another.

1. Reporting

Data from transcripts can be integrated with secondary resources to frame participants’ comments specifically within the context of your specific study, program and industry. Data analysis, interpretation, and presentation should be targeted directly at the study at hand and its program objectives.